



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 10

August 17, 2025

Irreconcilable Differences?

Luke 12:49–56

⁴⁹ “I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! ⁵¹ Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. ⁵² For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. ⁵³ Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

⁵⁴ Then He also said to the multitudes, “Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it is. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blow, you say, ‘There will be hot weather’; and there is. ⁵⁶ Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?”

Jesus is saddened by divisions in the church. Unhappiness, anger, personality clashes, and such like – these are not acceptable excuses for divisions among the people of God. We ought to get along. We ought to work through our problems, not avoid them. If a Christian has a conflict with another believer, Jesus says that he is to go to the one with whom he has the problem and be reconciled, confessing and repenting and forgiving.

Strange, then, that so many Christians are divided over the kinds of issues I have just mentioned. They leave marriages, break off friendships, sever connections with family members, and separate themselves from congregations on account of what is commonly referred to as “irreconcilable differences.” They leave because of differing opinions. They leave because the pastor turns out to be a poor miserable sinner. They leave because someone didn’t do what was expected of them. Beloved, this ought not so to be. The church should never be divided over things like that.

This is not to say, however, that there will never be divisions. Jesus says that divisions will certainly come; only, they ought never come because of us; they should only come because of Him! He says: “I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! Do *you* suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 10

August 17, 2025

That's a lot of division! Which is troubling! How can Christ divide? Isn't He the Prince of Peace? How can Jesus come to bring division, and to split up families, no less!? Such thoughts are sure to rattle modern sentiments. But they're fully consistent with who our Savior is. Peter calls Him a "A Stone of Stumbling, and a Rock of Offense" (1 Pet. 2:8). Mark informs us that Christ's own family "tried to get control of Him, because they thought He was crazy." Despite His sinless nature, He could incite a crowd to violence or drive His friends to commit murder.

And all He did was speak the truth: "I and the Father are one," and they picked up stones to kill Him. All He did was heal the sick and cast out demons, and they called Him the devil! He showed compassion on the poor and outcast, and they said He was a drunkard and a sinner. As long as He was doing what they wanted, crowds would follow Him by the thousands. But let Him try to feed them with a little substance: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you," and then they turned away in droves: "This is a hard saying," they groaned. "Who can accept it?"

Beloved, Jesus came to bring division. He is the great dividing line of history, who came to unleash fire upon the earth, to be the single solitary sacrifice which God consumed in wrath for our forgiveness. He came to turn a Father against His Son upon a cross, that God might never have to turn away from sinners like you and me. He came to be baptized into death, that you might be baptized into life. In Him, you hear that God no longer looks upon your sin. Apart from Him, your sin is all God sees. That's a divisive message if there ever was one.

Brothers and sisters, you cannot hold to Christ and not make enemies in this world. But hold to Him you must, or you will make yourself an enemy of God, and lose yourself in the process. You cannot make Christ less offensive. That would be to change Him, and that is, of course, to lose Him. And we can't afford to lose our Savior any more than this world, which needs Him no less than we do, and that means that it needs the Church to love them enough to let Christ create the right kind of divisions in our lives, and in our families, and even in our churches, for that is what happens when He reveals Himself to sinners. Divisions are created – between right and wrong, heaven and hell, believers and unbelievers, children of God and children of Satan. You're either with Him or against Him. There's no neutral territory, no middle ground. And that's as true for your neighbor as it is for you, and that lays something of a burden on you.

You see, our Lord reveals Himself in His Word and He's given us that Word to speak to others. It's a life-giving Word, a sin-forgiving Word, a peace-establishing Word. But you know what happened when that Word was spoken by our Savior, right? They nailed Him up for it. Do you think it'll be received any better when it comes from you or me? Jesus said: "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household" (Matt. 10:25). So, they will say you are of the devil – mean-spirited, un-loving,



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 10

August 17, 2025

racist, homophobic, anti-science, the list goes on – for when you give them Christ, you'll find that the battle against Him still goes on, and you are simply in the middle. That's the way it is.

So, you have no good reason to confuse the message. Don't try to shape Christ to fit their mold. They don't need a fake Christ, a pretend Christ, a Christ that seems more palatable; they need the real one.

Stick with the Christ you've been given. And don't change what He said and make up things you think He might have said or should have said. "What would Jesus Do?" is a pointless question, based on nothing but someone's imagination. What *did* Jesus do? Now, there's a question worth asking – and answering.

The worst thing we can do is change what Jesus said. Paul tells us that the church should never be divided over insults, misunderstandings, and personal opinions, but what we cannot tolerate is the introduction of false doctrines, because that steals the Savior from His people, which is why Paul urges us in his Letter to the Romans to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in our way that are contrary to the teaching we have learned. "Keep away from them," he says. He's not telling us to be mean or separatistic, but he wants us to hold on to nothing but God's Truth, which is the very thing that Satan has been trying to steal from us from the very beginning.

The Judaizers insisted that people had to keep the Law on top of having faith in Jesus. The Gnostics tried to make the Christian life ultra-spiritual, coming from within themselves as opposed to being an external gift from God. The Arians believed that Jesus was a created being rather than the eternally begotten Son of the Father, as is taught in Scripture. There have been many heresies over the centuries which have sliced up the Church with one doctrinal division after another. Of course! The devil would like nothing more than to leave people in the Church, so long as he's gotten the Church to leave behind the doctrine of Christ!

Beloved, we do not seek divisions, and we weep when they do arise. But neither do we avoid them when they come seeking us. We preach Christ and Him crucified. The Lord has given us His Gospel, and we proclaim it accordingly – right here, in Holy Baptism, where Jesus takes infant sinners into His hands and washes them in His rebirth of water and the Spirit. We proclaim the Gospel – here, where baptized sons and daughters make confession and receive Christ's Holy Absolution in the speaking of their pastor. And here, where Jesus puts His flesh into our mouths, His blood upon our lips, and by them, takes away our sin and fills us with Himself.

And for heaven's sake, we don't preach the pastor: "This one's got a better personality than that one over at that church!" Nor do we preach the congregation: "My, what friendly folks they are!" Nor do we preach our own opinions: "The way I see it is . . ." No, folks, we preach Christ! We preach what He has given us to preach. We don't preach doctrines made by men – doctrines such as: "Infants aren't sinners," or "babies can't believe," or



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 10

August 17, 2025

“God predestines some people to hell,” or “the infinite Christ cannot be contained in finite bread and wine.” We don’t preach divisive man-made doctrines such as, “Women should be pastors,” or “sex outside of marriage isn’t sin,” or “abortion isn’t murder.”

No, we humbly stick with what the Lord has given, and we don’t divert from what the Church has been confessing from the start. If we depart from that, then heed the words of Paul and have no more to do with us. But if we hold to what the Lord has given, then listen, for we don’t preach ourselves, and we don’t preach man’s works, and we don’t make a virtue out of sin, and we don’t place ourselves above the Scriptures or say that it’s okay when others do. We preach what Christ has given us to preach, and that is Christ Himself: who was baptized in blood to make you holy; who brought down fire upon Himself that judgment may no longer burn against His Church; and who, right now, speaks to you and tells you: “I forgive you. Come, that I may fill you with my Spirit, and send *you* out as fire upon the earth.” In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen